

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY

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Legislative Policy: Refugee Resettlement Programs

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Purpose

To establish the Board of Supervisors' legislative policy regarding issues related to refugee resettlement, and to provide guidance to the County's legislative representatives when advocating the County's interests to legislators, other elected officials and policy makers.

Background

The Refugee Act of 1980 provides a framework for:

- Admitting refugees of national interest to the United States through uniform provisions; and
- Authorizing federal assistance to resettle and promote the self-sufficiency of those refugees who are admitted.

Persons that are authorized to receive Refugee Resettlement assistance include:

- Refugee or Asylee – a person who is fleeing his or her country of residence because of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; and receives refugee status or is granted asylum.
- Victim of Trafficking – a child victim (under 18 years of age), who is eligible for services and designated by the federal government to be a victim of a severe form of trafficking (kidnap or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex induced by force, fraud or slavery).

Except for such unusual circumstances as the Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) may recognize, the Act intends that refugees be initially resettled in areas other than those already highly impacted by the presence of refugees – unless they are being reunited with family members. In response to disparities in resettlement, since 1983, San Diego County has been designated as an area highly impacted by refugees, qualifying the region for additional federal funding.

Federal funding for employment services is generally limited to refugees who have been in the U.S. for 60 months or less. While funding is available for the 60 month timeframe, the goal of the services is to help the recipient achieve self sufficiency within one year.

The federal government is responsible for funding and administering refugee assistance (cash and medical, employment, preventive health and matching grants). The State of California has given counties the flexibility to design and manage local refugee employment and refugee health programs.

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Historically, inadequate federal appropriations have resulted in reductions in cash and medical assistance, effectively shifting the financial responsibility for many refugees to states and counties. Limited federal resources for refugee programs have adversely affected the ability of local governments to meet local needs.

The County of San Diego receives funding from ORR intended to help refugees seek employment and enable them to achieve self-sufficiency. The amounts received are inadequate to provide services and meet the needs of the expanding refugee community in San Diego. The demographic characteristics of refugees in San Diego county present two types of challenges that could be better addressed with additional funding:

- Many of the refugees have limited English language skills, which makes it difficult to navigate application processes and creates difficulties in accessing services such as CalWORKs. The application process is made more complicated by the lack of translators available to assist the clients.
- A culturally competent approach is necessary to serve this population. For example, trauma they have faced in their country of origin require support to access specialty services such as Mental Health. Many county and community programs are already underfunded, and the population of refugees and the need for culturally competent services is increasing with no commensurate increase in resources.

Policy

The legislative policy of the Board of Supervisors regarding issues related to refugee resettlement is to:

Planning and Coordination

1. Support a federal planning process that produces a national refugee resettlement plan, in advance of future refugee arrivals, utilizing input from the states and local government.
2. Support coordination with all government and voluntary agencies to accomplish effective local refugee resettlement with a priority for family reunification cases.

Funding

1. Support 100 percent federal reimbursement of expenses incurred by local governments and agencies engaged in the refugee resettlement efforts.
2. Support 100 percent federal reimbursement for time expired refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, and secondary migrants.

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3. Support incentive funding for localities that successfully integrate refugees into the local economy, removing them from public assistance rolls.
4. Support distribution of funding based on the refugee's current residence rather than his or her point of initial resettlement.
5. Support adequate and ongoing federal funding designed to reduce welfare dependency and increase self-sufficiency among refugees in impacted areas.
6. Support adequate and ongoing federal funding to meet the health needs of refugees in impacted areas.
7. Support and increase in targeted federal funding to effectively resettle refugees and aid in assimilation.

Health and Education Services

1. Support health screening of newly arrived refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking to minimize communicable disease exposure identify conditions of intervention, and evaluate health barriers to employment.
2. Support increased federal appropriations for health, citizenship education for elderly refugees, and bi-lingual services for local institutions/government (e.g., school districts, hospitals, and police departments) impacted by increases in refugees.
3. Support expansion of funding for mental health programs, family support services and community development.

Employment Services and Benefits

1. Support the promotion of early employment, including Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL)/English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs and short-term employment training.
2. Support the promotion of improved corporate relationships to facilitate refugee employment opportunities in private industry.
3. Support proposals that would avoid duplication of refugee services and encourage maximum coordination between agencies that serve the refugee population.

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4. Support efforts to maximize the use of voluntary non-profit organizations, mutual assistance associations, and other agencies to achieve the goal of economic self-sufficiency and effective resettlement for refugees residing in San Diego County.
5. Support the evaluation of federal refugee projects for cost effectiveness.
6. Oppose priority service, eligibility advantages, or higher benefit levels for refugees over similar assistance programs available to U.S. citizens.

Responsible Departments

Chief Administrative Office
Office of Strategy and Intergovernmental Affairs
Health and Human Services Agency

Sunset Date

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-17.

References

Board Action 3-16-77 (16)
Board Action 7-15-81 (6)
Board Action 12-11-84 (21)
Board Action 3-1-88 (106)
Board Action 6-18-95
Board Action 1-9-96 (4)
Board Action 10-31-06 (14)
Board Action 12-09-08 (33)
Board Action 12-07-10 (27)